

it was 200
years ago,
a Saturday
to be exact



1803



BREWSTER BICENTENNIAL



2003



Brewster Ladies' Library Assn.
1822 Main Street
Brewster, MA 02631

the date was the 19th of February, 1803, when the people of what had been the North Parish of Harwich were celebrating a tremendously important event. They had at last taken a long-desired giant step...partitioned their home town into two...and proudly named their newly separated town "Brewster".

This little booklet will take you time-traveling back to 1803 for a brief glimpse at the brand new Town of Brewster...what it looked like...what its mills and saltworks were like...how the people fed and clothed themselves... and what problems they had before trains, before planes, before cars, before phones, radios, TV or even a reliable mail service!



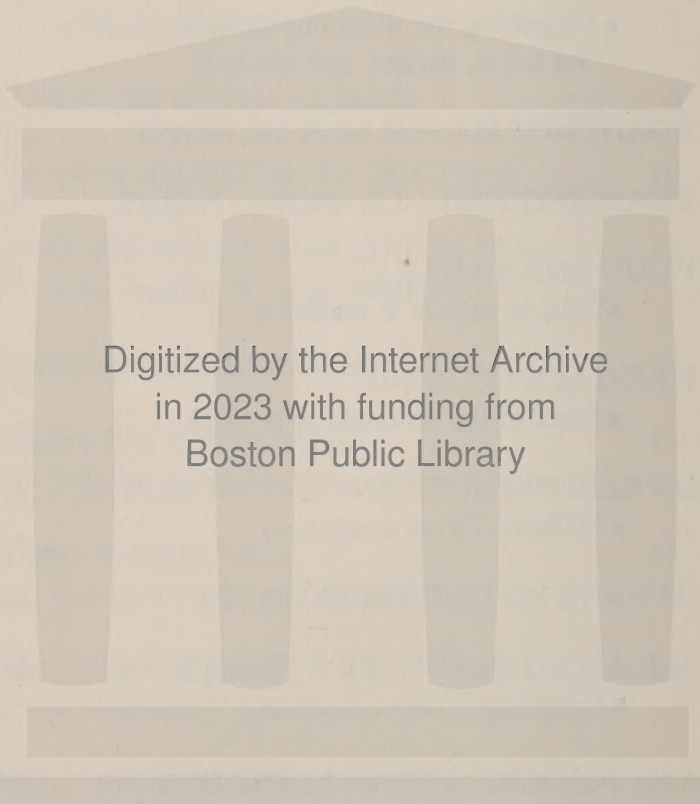
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WHY HARWICH SEPARATED

● Two sides to the story

The answer to that “Why” is to be found way back in time, long before the 1803 separation actually took place...when in 1659 the first settler arrived, and built his home near the Bay. His name was John Wing. He was not coming to live in a town, but into a wilderness area inhabited by only a few Indians. John Wing acquired all of the land located between Quivet Creek (our present Dennis/Brewster town line) and Stony Brook, which was then called Saugatucket by the local Indians. Wing’s land extended clear across the Cape, stretching from the Bay side on the north to the Ocean on the south side.

Wing’s Island is named after him. And if you walk the John Wing Trail to the Island, you will find a big rock with a marker which says Wing’s house may have stood here.

Not long after Wing settled here, John Dillingham joined him moving from Sandwich where both men and their families had lived. Dillingham built his new home here in 1660. It still stands sited close to 6A in West Brewster.

These men and the settlers who followed were not living in an established town. It was open land, basically under the control of the government, which granted permission to people to move in. This particular area was called a "Plantation", and people were encouraged to settle here. And many did...some preferring to live near the shore on the Bay side as John Wing had, and others choosing to live on the south, or Ocean side of the Cape. They chose to settle near water because that way they were handy to good fishing...fish being an important part of their diet. And they were also handy to transportation, for they traveled mostly by boat then, what roads existed being hardly more than Indian paths through the woods.

As time went by, and more and more people came to live in these communities, they decided that it would be to their advantage if instead of being loosely regulated settlements they became an established township. The new town would be properly incorporated by an Act of the Legislature. The people would elect town officials. There would be a formal government to look after the interests and welfare of the people.

So it was that in 1694 the entire area stretching from the Bay in the north to the Ocean in the south became the Town of Harwich. And that was when the very first settlers in this area, the Wings and the Dillinghams, whom we always think of as founders of Brewster, were actually the founders of Harwich.

Back in those days the law said if you wanted to establish a properly incorporated town, you must also establish a

church. So in 1700 the people of the new Town of Harwich erected their first church building about where Brewster's First Parish Church now stands at the corner of Breakwater Road and 6A. The area was then called the North Parish. Since it was customary, at that time, for church and government to function together, the new church became the government center of the Town of Harwich.

Unfortunately, setting up the Town's center on the north side of Harwich created many problems and inconveniences for people living on the south side. For instance, every Sunday they had to travel clear across the Cape to attend Sunday services. Back then it was mandatory for everyone to attend church on Sunday. And when a Town Meeting was called, all the south side men had to trek all the way across Cape to attend that meeting, which was then also held in the Church. Needless to say, it was a long arduous trip. The only connecting road stretched for some 6 miles of sandy ruts winding uphill and down, through the woods

and skirting ponds which sometimes flooded the road.

Imagine walking all those miles to church or town meeting, and then the same 6 miles back home, no matter what the weather. Even those traveling by wagon or horseback found it a rough, bone-jarring trip.

So it was only natural, with no good road connecting the north and south sides of Harwich, the two sides thus isolated one from another would develop into quite different communities, with very different needs and concerns, and very strong opinions about how each side wanted “their town” to be run. There must have been more than one Town Meeting where an irate citizen stood up and said, “Why should I pay taxes for something that only benefits folks living over there on the other side?!”

Nor did the problems abate as the years went by. There was a growing dissatisfaction on both sides of town. Things

weren't working out as they had hoped when the original Town of Harwich was incorporated.

That's why, at last, the two communities so divided both geographically and in outlooks and interests, decided the time had come to make it official and separate into two towns. That was when the Wiggs and the Dillinghams, founders and leading citizens of Harwich, overnight became founding citizens of the new Town of Brewster. All of which happened 200 years ago, one very exciting Saturday, February the 19th, 1803.

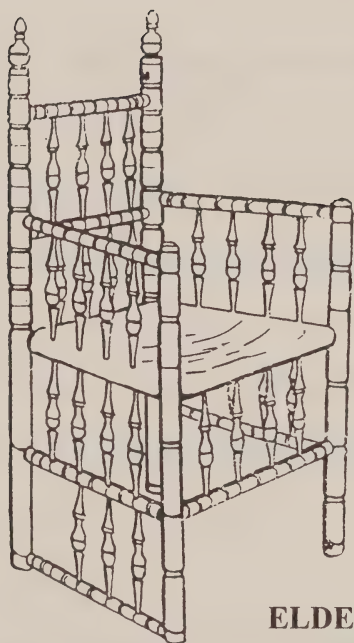
To make sure everyone was completely satisfied with this new arrangement, it was decreed that anyone who lived in the new Town of Brewster, but wished to remain a citizen of the Town of Harwich was permitted to do so. Which, at times, must have confused both the Brewster and Harwich census takers greatly.

WHY OUR TOWN WAS NAMED BREWSTER

● Pilgrims' pride

There are actually no old documents to tell us why the people chose the name “Brewster” for their new town. But by looking back at events that had shaped the lives and character of Cape Codders, and what things in particular were uppermost in their minds in 1803, some excellent clues can be found.

To begin, although it had been over 180 years since the Pilgrims came to this land with Elder Brewster, their leader, memories of the greatness of this man still burned brightly. Some families living in this area traced ancestral connections to Elder Brewster (and still do!). And it was with great pride townspeople in general honored his memory, holding him in greatest esteem for his wisdom and courage. And for his role in assuring the survival of the little band of Pilgrim settlers.



ELDER BREWSTER'S CHAIR

The little chair shown here in the bottom left quarter of Brewster's 2003 bicentennial emblem is the very same Elder Brewster chair which appears on our town seal, designed in 1898.

Now compare it with the larger chair pictured here, sketched a few years ago at the Pilgrim Society Museum in Plymouth, where the famous chair is on display. Why don't the spindles match? Probably the town seal design shows the chair as it looked in 1898. But when the latest sketch was made some spindles had been replaced.

Spindles or not, Elder Brewster's chair looks far from comfortable, not exactly for lounging. And it is not a large chair. In Brewster's time, people were much smaller than today...generally 5'4" or less. By its size, Brewster's chair tells us he too was small in stature. But Elder William Brewster was a giant in the history of our country's first Pilgrim settlers.

This is a good place to note that William Brewster was called “Elder” not because of his age, but because he held the important title of Elder in the Pilgrims’ church , and was their church leader for many years when they had no ordained minister.

Traditionally most Cape towns were named after the villages and townships the Pilgrims left behind when they came to this country. Names like Sandwich, Yarmouth, Barnstable, Truro suggest that, despite their determination to establish a new homeland, the first settlers on the Cape felt more than a little nostalgia for former homes in England. But by 1803 attitudes toward England were greatly changed. Already the people in the town just west of Brewster had broken with the old traditions, and named their town Dennis, not after a hometown in England, but after their much-loved pastor, Josiah Dennis.

Now there was the opportunity for our newly formed town to honor yet another great man, by the citizens naming their town Brewster. However, there probably was another reason even more important than the first.

THE NEW AMERICAN PATRIOTISM

In 1803 Cape Codders, and the people throughout this country, were still struggling to separate themselves completely from the politics of British rule. Despite our country's Declaration of Independence in 1776, the British seemed to have a hard time accepting the fact that America was no longer an outpost of the British Empire. The horrendous War between colonists and Britain, that followed the Declaration, had seen many Cape men fighting in the ragtag, determined-to-be-free Continental Army, under General George Washington. And as though all this was not enough, frictions between the two nations were generating still another conflict with Britain, which would develop into the War of 1812.



Which saw Commander Richard Ragget, of His Majesty's Royal Navy, moor his ship off Brewster shores and demand a ransom of \$4,000, or he would bombard the Town's saltworks!

So when the newly separated town came to choose a name that of Elder Brewster was a natural. He was one of the original dissenters against British rule, and as such it was he who led the little band of Pilgrims out of British oppression and to the freedom of America. In the mood of mounting American patriotism sweeping over the country in 1803, naming the town "Brewster" would tell all of Cape Cod, and the entire country for that matter, exactly where the townspeople stood in matters of independence and freedom!

WHAT BREWSTER WAS LIKE IN 1803

- So familiar & yet so different

If you were to be carried back to 1803 in a magic time machine which set you down in the middle of town, what

would probably surprise you most was the lack of trees, the barren aspect of the landscape.

Right from the start, early settlers cut down trees for wood to build their homes and barns and boats and wagons and anything else made of wood. They converted acres of forests into acres of hay fields, so they could raise winter fodder and bedding for cows and horses. Extensive acreage was plowed up into farm gardens, for the people had to raise most of what they ate. It took cords and cords of fireplace logs for cooking and heating. So it wasn't too long before most of the land was denuded of trees. At a time when there was no home heating oil, and no natural gas, the shortage of wood for fuel was so serious in Brewster that some people were learning to cut and dry peat for fuel!

While the barren look of the land would seem strange to you, some of the familiar little houses now lining 6A were there then. And there was the Capt. Elijah Cobb house on

Lobster Lane (Lower Road)...and the Edward Snow house (the yellow one) at 2042 Main St., near the First Parish Church...and the ancient saltbox style Sears home, now called “Bound Brook”, located on the Brewster/Dennis town line. And, of course, John Dillingham’s house, built in 1660. But those are only a few, and if you want to find out more about Brewster’s historic houses, visit the Ladies’ Library and ask to see *Historic Brewster, Books 1 and 2*.

SHOEING MAN AND BEAST

Walk down the dusty main road heading east, and you will pass at least one shoemaker’s shop. In 1803 when you needed shoes or boots you went to the shoemaker’s shop to have them custom made for you. During the summer time many young people didn’t wear shoes at all (except, of course, when going to church on Sundays), preferring to go barefoot. What’s more, shoes were expensive!

A bit further down the road you will probably hear the sound of a blacksmith working at his anvil, hammering out new iron shoes for patiently waiting horses, or maybe even for some oxen. Both animals needed good shoes to help keep their hooves from being injured on the rough, stony ways that passed for roads, back then.

The blacksmith would also mend the cast iron cooking pots used in fireplace cooking back in 1803. There were no stoves then to cook on. If a pot handle broke, or the pot sprung a leak, you would take it to the blacksmith to be fixed. He also made tools, and ladles for kitchen use, and any metal fixtures that might be needed in the house or barn.

Continuing your walk you'll notice that there are no coffee shops, or restaurants where you could get a hamburger, or stores where you could buy milk. Most everyone had a cow, and big families had several.

BREWSTER'S WINDMILL

● Some windy business in Brewster

Probably the most exciting thing you'll see is a real windmill, built about 1795, and located down Ellis Landing Road a bit. It originally stood alongside the main road. But the sight and sound of the great arms whooshing around, as they turned the stone that ground the corn, frightened passing horses. So the mill was moved down the road a bit.

And in 1974 it was moved again, this time to a little hill on the west side of the Drummer Boy Park, on 6A. You should visit the mill some summer day, when it is regularly open to visitors, and take a tour to see how corn meal was made in 1803. Someone who loved the old mill penciled a poem on the side of the stairway which says, "Old Mill, your dear arms seem to stretch out in loving embrace to me." You can still see it there today.

If that day in 1803, when you and your time machine arrived in Brewster, was a good breezy one, with enough wind power to turn the windmill arms, there would be people

there, with their sacks of corn, waiting to have it ground into meal or flour. It's difficult for us to comprehend these days, when we can buy all the bread and flour we want at the store, that in 1803 there were no bakeries in Brewster, and no such thing as a supermarket anywhere. Back in 1803 Brewster women baked bread at home, most commonly making it of corn, not wheat flour. It was not easy to grow wheat on the Cape, but everyone grew corn. Although corn was fairly easy to grow, it required a lot of work to make it ready for bread baking. After harvesting, the cobs had to be husked out and then dried for about a year. Then the kernels were "shelled" off the cobs, bagged up, and finally brought to the mill to be ground. So making bread in 1803 took a lot of work.

You didn't need to worry about having enough money to pay the miller for his services. It was customary for him to take his pay in a measure of the corn before it was ground.

STONY BROOK MILL

- A power play and a fish story

If the wind was not strong enough to turn the windmill arms so your corn could be ground there, you could take it to Brewster's water mill on Stony Brook Road (the brook was then called "Saugatucket"). The water mill was located here long before there was a windmill. In 1663 it was grinding its first corn, and was the very first such mill anywhere on the Cape. (Our earliest record of the windmill is on a 1795 map of the town.)

It is pretty safe to say that the reason why John Wing and John Dillingham decided to settle in this part of the Cape was because they knew the brook could be a great source of power to drive a mill to grind corn. They recognized that the brook was unique, the only one on the Cape that was a natural source of water power. For it tumbles some 26

lateral feet as it descends its rocky course before joining Paine's Creek and flowing out into the Bay.

There was another very important reason why they were interested in the brook. In the spring it was also a herring run. In late April and early May, when the fresh brook water mingling with the salt ocean waters of the Bay warms up to just the right temperature, it signals the herring and alewives that it is time to start their swarming, struggling, dashing run up the brook to reach the ponds beyond, there to lay their eggs. These fish were taken in great quantities from the run, the biggest and fattest to be smoked or salted for future eating. The rest went to the fields, where they became the fertilizer that helped grow the corn. You might say Wing and Dillingham had discovered a complete package here...a brook that supplied the fish to fertilize the growing corn...and also supplied the water power to grind the corn into meal to make their daily bread.

The Stony Brook herring run has changed a bit since the first grist mill was built there. So-called “fish ladders” have been constructed, actually a series of small pools with each one a fish leap higher up than the last. The ladders make it a bit easier for the herring and alewives to struggle up the steeply inclined brook on their trip to the mill pond and beyond.

FACTORY VILLAGE

● Location! Location!

As time went by, more and more businesses located in the Saugatucket/Stony Brook area. Shortly after the gristmill was built, a fulling mill went up across the street. Here the home-made woolen cloth was brought to be washed and shrunken, and made ready to be sewn into clothes. Once there was a carding mill where wool shorn from the sheep would be brought to have the tangles combed out so it could be spun into yarn.

Later, there was a tannery processing hides into leather...a factory where axes were made...another manufacturing lamp black used to make black paint which was used to paint the hulls of ships...to name but a few of the businesses now long gone and leaving not a trace of their busy existence. No wonder old maps show this area as Factory Village.

In 1803, at the time of your visit to Brewster, the old water mill was still grinding corn, for there was as yet no electricity to run the machinery. And many Brewster people were still growing corn to make their bread, and for some of the farm animals to eat as well. This old mill was located across the street from today's mill and stood where the brook branches into two streams. It is here, to this building, that you will bring your sack of corn, and carry it down the steep banking to hand it over to the miller to be ground. While you wait, listen to the sound of the water wheel sloshing as it goes about its business of turning the whirring stone to grind the meal. And discover that nothing

compares with the delicious smell of corn being ground except the wonderful taste of corn bread made with freshly ground meal.

WHAT'S IN A NAME

Stony Brook has been known by several different names over the years. The Indians called it Saugatucket, which name we have shortened to Satucket. It was known as Herring Brook, and Mill Brook. And at one time it was Winslow's Brook, so-called after a family who had lived on the hill just beyond the mill site and owned a lot of land thereabouts. And finally it was named Stony Brook, which name certainly describes it well.

The road to the mill also changed names upon occasion. When the area was called Factory Village and was the business center in the Town of Brewster, the road was named Stage Coach Road because the stages traveled down this busy way carrying travelers who came to do business

The big, white house next to our present Stony Brook Mill building, was a stage coach stop. Here passengers could get something to eat, and stay overnight if they needed to.

A SALTY STORY

- Why Brewster got into the salt business

Leaving Factory Village in your time machine, you would want to take a trip down Lobster Lane (Lower Road, nowadays) and up around Wing's Island to look out over the marshes and shoreline to see the astonishing array of saltworks vats. In 1803 Brewster people were making tons of salt from sea water, which was pumped into shallow wooden vats (according to Parson Simpkins, some 60,000 feet of them) where the sun dried up the water, leaving the salt behind.

“But,” you are probably saying, “Why would people bother to make salt when it is so cheap to buy?” And they might never have done so except that the British, from whom they

imported everything including salt, decided to charge a high tax on it. And when the American people revolted against the terribly high price of salt, the British decided not to ship any salt at all to this country.

Salt was a major necessity back in 1803, for there was no such thing as a refrigerator, and a great deal of salt was needed to process and preserve meat and fish. Additional tons of salt were used to process salt cod, an industry for which the Cape was famous, with Cape Cod salt cod being shipped all over to a very profitable market. But the great British salt embargo was just the stimulus one Dennis man needed to go about experimenting in making sea salt. In 1799 John Sears received a patent for his invention for a good way to make salt by solar evaporation.

His method was so successful that, patent or no patent, it was adopted all over the Cape. And by 1803 Brewster people were making so much salt that tons of it from Brewster alone would be shipped to markets all along the

coast, Boston, New York, wherever there was a good price offered.

Very early on, the Town of Brewster appointed a Sealer of Salt. He was a salt inspector, who made sure that the various kinds of salt extracted from the sea water were pure and exactly as labeled. He would then stamp his seal of approval on the barrels or boxes. Which is why he was called a Sealer of Salt.

THE GREAT SALT RANSOM

Only 10 years after Brewster became a full-fledged town, salt production had become our biggest, most profitable business. So profitable, in fact, it attracted the attention of the British Commander Richard Ragget (mentioned before on p.11) who moored his vessel H.M.S. Spencer just off shore and threatened to fire his ship's cannon at the salt works and blow them up if he wasn't paid \$4,000 cash, a huge amount of money in those days. But that was during the War of 1812. And since your time machine is set for

just the year 1803, you will have to pretend you have not an inkling of what's in store for Brewster's salt works in the future.

While you won't find any saltworks along Brewster shores today, they have not totally disappeared. When the vats were no longer needed they were dismantled. Some years later some of the old wood, which had been thoroughly saturated with seawater, was used to build the present Stony Brook mill. Visit the museum located above the mill and you will notice the walls and some of the roof rafters look as though they had a thin coat of white paint. Actually that white is the residue of salt which came out of the wood as it dried.

LEST THEY GROW UP IGNORANT

- What Brewster schools were like in 1803

An old Brewster law said "All children between the ages of seven and fifteen years, residing in said town, and to be

found wandering about the streets, not attending school and growing up ignorant, shall be committed for confinement, instruction and discipline.”

Translated this probably meant the children were escorted back to their assigned schools, where they would be required to stay after school, while the teacher gave them special lessons to make up for missed classes.

Schools must have been a lot of fun in 1803. They were small buildings with just one classroom. Here all the different grades were taught by one teacher. There were very few students in each school, for the entire population of Brewster was only about 1,000 people. There were four of these little white schoolhouse buildings conveniently located about the town so students would not have too far to walk. And walk they did, for there were no school buses then.

There was also another very different school in Brewster. It was called a “man’s school”. Here boys and young men were taught mathematics, navigation, map making and reading, and other skills they would need when they went to sea, as a very large number of them would. Many boys were off to sea at the age of 11 or 12 years as cabin boys, where they would get first hand knowledge on how to run a ship. At one time Brewster had the reputation for having more Shipmasters and Mates sailing the high seas than any other town of comparable size. That is why Brewster is called the Captains’ Town.

It didn’t cost very much to run Brewster’s schools in 1803. One Town Meeting article called for \$200 for the schools, with an additional \$35 for the teaching of music. On the other hand, the man’s school budget was a whopping \$3,000!

WHAT--NO JUNK MAIL? ? !

- Or getting the word out in 1803
via horse, packet, and windmill

Not only was there no junk mail back in 1803, there was hardly any mail at all...no regular delivery service...no Brewster Post Office, and wouldn't be for a long time to come. When you wanted to send a letter you gave it to the Post Rider to deliver. He rode horseback from town to town picking up and delivering the mail. The problem was you couldn't be sure if or when he would come. Even as late as 1814 Brewster town officials petitioned the Postmaster General to require the Post Rider to schedule one day each week when he would pick up and deliver Brewster mail. A few years later another request went to the Postmaster General asking that Brewster have twice-a-week mail service.

If the Post Rider still failed in his duties, you could ask one of the Packet Ship captains, who periodically made trips to Boston, if he would deliver your mail. And chances are the

recipients up there would send back a message to you via the same sea route.

To appreciate fully how important even the skimpiest of mail service was to Brewster people, you must realize that there were no telephones, no radios, no E-mail in 1803.

But there was another very interesting way of sending messages you probably have never head about....windmill signals. Located atop windy hills, the Cape's windmills could be seen for miles across the treeless country.

How did it work? Suppose a miller in Bourne gets word that the British have occupied Philadelphia (which they did during the Revolutionary War). The Bourne miller would position the arms of his mill at a special angle, understood by all the other millers, to indicate a disastrous event. Then millers the length of the Cape would, one by one pick up the message, and set their arms at the same angle. Mill signals could carry others kinds of messages as well. One angle could mean there was to be a wedding. Another a baby had

been born, and by the angle of the mill arms people knew whether it was a boy or a girl. Perhaps the most important signal of all was the one that indicated the miller would be open for business that day. "Bring your corn to be ground."

ROADS NOT FIT FOR MAN OR BEAST

There are no cars, no bicycles, and no paved roads anywhere in Brewster in 1803. And therein lies a big problem. For when you drive your wagon, or ride your horse over Brewster's dirt roads, the pounding action of hooves, and the turning of wheels churn up the sandy soil. Soon the road is full of deep ruts and pot holes.

In dry, hot summer weather, roads would be ankle deep in sandy dust. In wet weather, particularly during spring thaws, those ruts would turn into mud. To make matters even more difficult, the Town of Brewster had no road crews to keep things in repair, the way we do now. Instead, a town law said every able-bodied man was responsible for

helping to maintain the roads, each man being assigned a specific stretch of road he was supposed to keep in reasonable repair, smoothing the ruts and filling pot holes. Should he carelessly fail to do so, he would be fined. Which didn't much help a passing wagon if a wheel broke in a hole, or the wagon tipped over because the road was so bad. There were many things about Brewster in 1803 which were delightful. But dirt roads were not among them.

You will be glad to know that in 1807 the Town finally voted money, the large sum of \$75, for repairing the roads.

CHANGING TIMES--CHANGING NAMES

Of course there were far fewer roads back then. And some of the names of our town roads tell you interesting things about Brewster's history. Our Main Street had its beginnings as an Indian trail. Early on it was called the Old King's Highway. And now it is called Route 6A. But until fairly recently, where this main road continued on through

Orleans, old timers called it Brewster County Road, or Brewster Main Street. Tubman Road was once Poverty Lane after poverty grass growing there. Route 137 had two names, Depot Street between Main Street and Underpass Road where the train station stood... and from there it was Chatham Road which took you cross-country to Chatham.

The road that leads to the shore and is called Breakwater Road was once known as the Packet Landing Road because it led to the boat wharf where packet boats landed. People traveled from all around to take the Brewster packet boat to Boston. This road was also called Tupelo Road after the handsome trees that grew along the way, and some still do. And now it is Breakwater Road after the breakwater built in the shape of a stone wall out on the beach. The wall helped break the force of incoming waves, creating a harbor of sorts for the packet boats. You can still see a trace of the breakwater when you look from either Breakwater Beach or Breakwater Landing, at low tide.

PLAIN AND SIMPLE

● Or what to expect at mealtime of 1803

Would you believe there was no peanut butter in 1803, or candy bars, or your favorite breakfast cereal...or orange juice to go with it! That's because almost everything Brewster folks ate was what they could grow themselves. Pumpkins, squash, beans, corn, turnips, potatoes, onions, carrots were staples...along with apples, some pears, and of course, cranberries because they learned about those from the Indians.

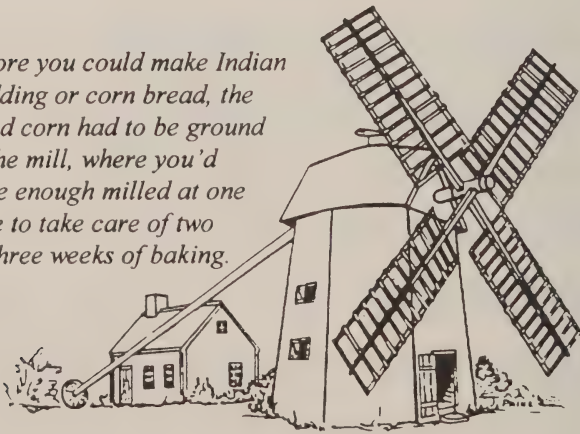
There were no frozen dinners because there were no refrigerators. People went fishing for mackerel and cod. They dug clams and gathered oysters. Lobsters were plentiful right out in the Bay. In winter they speared eels through the ice on ponds.

In the fall when the weather turned cold, most families butchered a pig or two. And then there would be bacon and ham, maybe sausage, pork roasts. Every bit was used

including the fat which was turned into lard and used to fry donuts and to make crusts for apple pies.

Of course, most everyone had a few chickens which produced nice fresh eggs. And a cow for milk. But if you didn't, and needed milk occasionally, you might arrange with a neighbor to buy a pitcherful. Not a gallon or a quart, but a pitcherful when it was needed to make chowder or Indian pudding (so named, not because the Indians invented it, but because it was made with Indian corn meal).

Before you could make Indian Pudding or corn bread, the dried corn had to be ground at the mill, where you'd have enough milled at one time to take care of two or three weeks of baking.



FIREPLACE COOKING

- State of the art cookery in 1803

An old cookbook published as late as 1852, says meals prepared on one of the new fangled iron cook stoves are nowhere near as healthful or tasty as those cooked over the fireplace. In 1803 that was the only way Brewster folks prepared meals. Fireplace cooking was a real art!

The main meal of the day was often stew, cooked in a big iron pot which hung from a iron rod called a “crane”. The crane could be swung over the fire to cook the stew, and back over the hearth for serving it. Into the stew would go vegetables and some meat to simmer for hours. People also made chowders with fish, and onions, and potatoes and salt pork as we do today. Meat was usually roasted over the fire on a spit, which was an iron skewer pushed through the meat, and which had to be turned constantly so the meat would cook evenly.

There were two kinds of ovens, neither one like anything we use today. One was a hearth oven, a 4-sided box-like arrangement made of sheet metal. It sat on the hearth with the open side toward the fire so the reflected heat would bake the bread or whatever was to be cooked inside. The other kind of oven was built into the fireplace, usually on the right hand side. It was made of brick and was long and narrow, and had an iron door. It was heated by shoveling hot coals from the fireplace fire into the oven...or by actually building a fire in the oven itself. It took an hour or so for such an oven to heat up. Since there were no oven thermometers then, you had to guess when the temperature was right, at which time the ashes would be swept out of the oven, and the bread and pies or whatever else was to be baked would be slid in. You would use a long handled wood paddle called a "peel" to slide pans in and out...just the way real Italian pizza is handled today! If you were baking beans, however, the big pot was often put right into

the fireplace, with the coals heaped up around it, to bake slowly for hours. Preparing meals back in 1803 required a lot of work and time. Which was one good reason for keeping them plain and simple.

*How you got from here
to there back then.* —



ON KEEPING BUSY AND HAVING FUN

- Without TV or computers

An old sea chanty says:

*“Cape Cod boys they have no sleds,
they slide down hill on codfish heads.”*

A chanty is a song with a strong rhythmic beat which is sung by sailors to help them all pull together when hauling up heavy sails or raising an anchor.

With or without sleds, there’s no doubt that Brewster boys had plenty of opportunity to go sliding. For winters brought a lot more snow in the early 1800s than they do

today. And there would have been skating...ponds froze early and thick. There was no such thing as hockey skates, or figure skates in 1803. An ancient pair of skates, such as boys and girls might have used, may be seen in the Museum upstairs in the Stony Brook Mill building. They are made of wood with metal blades, and would have been held on by buckling leather straps tightly over one's shoes.

About girls, the same sea chanty says:

*"Cape Cod girls they have no combs,
they comb their hair with codfish bones."*

True or not, a girl could spend just so much time combing her hair. Then, most likely, she went off with brother to go skating or slide down a hill. As winter turned into spring, a boy could have a great time helping his dad net fish at the herring run. And later on, both boys and girls would look for wild strawberries, and pick blueberries, and gather cranberries in the fall.

There were so many chores to do just to keep the family and farm running, and provide food for the table, there might not have been a lot of time just for fun, at least as we think of fun. Boys would be expected to keep the woodpile, next to the kitchen fireplace, stacked with wood. When old enough, a boy would also be expected to chop and split that wood. Both boys and girls learned how to milk cows, which had to be done twice a day. The whole family could get involved at planting time. And when it came time to mow the hay and gather it in, a boy would be expected to pitch his share into the hay wagon, and from there into the barn hayloft. When a boy was 9 or 10 years old, it could be his responsibility to lead the family horse, loaded with sacks of corn, to the grist mill where the grain would be ground. This was a chore which was also a lot of fun because there was so much to see and learn at either the windmill or Stony Brook mill.

Along with helping with the farm work, a boy often went fishing with his dad, with whole days spent at sea catching mackerel or cod. And at the end of the fishing season, when boats were hauled up and nets spread to clean and mend, a boy could be expected to help in these areas. And while the work seems ceaseless to us today, boys still found time to go to school as required lest they “grow up ignorant”. A great many Brewster lads went off to sea when they were 11 or 12 years old, serving as cabin boys. They might be gone for months. This is where they got a large part of their training to become Mates or Captains.

Girls, at an early age, learned to card wool shorn from the family sheep, and to spin it into yarn suitable for making cloth or blankets. Girls learned to knit socks and mittens and other things. When big enough to be able to work on the heavy loom (which about filled the living/kitchen area when in use, but could be taken apart and stored when not

needed) girls were expected to weave a certain amount of cloth each day. Mothers taught daughters how to sew the homespun material into all manner of family clothing.

Probably little girls, just learning to sew, would be assigned the simple but important task of making good, strong cloth sacks to carry the corn to the mill to be ground. Paper and plastic bags didn't exist in Brewster back then.

Girls learned how to make soap using lye washed out of carefully saved fireplace ashes. The lye would be combined with melted animal fats which were also saved up for this purpose. Girls helped make candles, and gathered bayberries for their wax which was used as a hardening agent for the candle wax. And, of course, girls learned the intricacies of fireplace cooking, which would include knowing how to bank a fire at bedtime so that come morning there would still be a few live coals left under the ashes to start a new fire. (The very first matches were not

invented until 1827!) It was often a girl's job to feed the chickens and gather their eggs, which could turn into an egg hunt if some of the chickens chose not to lay their eggs in the hen house. When there was enough milk, a girl often had the task of churning butter which could take quite a while before the butter began to form on the churn dasher. And that wasn't the whole job. The butter had to be washed in cold water to get out every last bit of the butter milk. And then it was pressed to get out all the water. You wonder where girls found time to go to school, but they did. Brewster people valued education for all their children very highly.

To add to the list of things you wouldn't find in Brewster in 1803, there was no hot and cold running water, no showers, no dishwashers, and no washing machines. No faucets... water came by the bucketful from an outdoor well. The closest thing to a shower was a swim in a nearby pond. Dishes were hand washed in a basin of water that had been

heated over the fireplace. And laundry was done out of doors, where bucket after bucket of water was hauled up from the well, and poured into a great kettle hung over a brisk wood fire, and heated to boiling. Then home-made lye soap was added and load after load of the family laundry. It was boiled and stirred with strong sticks. And when clean lifted out, piece by piece on sticks, to be dropped into a big kettle of clean, cold rinse water. Finally it was wrung out by hand and spread on the grass or bushes to dry. Laundry was an all day chore requiring many kettles of fresh water and a lot of firewood. Which was as good a reason as any for doing the laundry only a few times a year!

We write about all these laborious tasks so you can get a true feeling for what life was really like in Brewster in 1803.

If it seems that chores were never ending and there was little time left for fun, old diaries and other writings tell us otherwise. Actually boys and girls enjoyed all kinds of

interesting activities, and at the same time learned a lot about being self-sufficient. Which would make them feel very good about themselves.

IMAGINE NO LIBRARY TO GO TO!

In 1803 there were no public libraries in Brewster, not even in the schools. Every family had a Bible, parts of which were read every day at a family gathering. And many people could say they had read it completely! There were a few people who had small collections of books, maybe a dozen or two, and you might be able to borrow from them. But it was sixty-five long years after Brewster became a town, that our present Brewster Ladies' Library opened its doors in 1868.



In 1868 the Ladies' Library was heated by two fireplaces! And roof peaks were topped with fancy iron grillwork.

ALL ABOUT BREWSTER'S TOWN FLAG

Our flag is actually two flags in one, with a different design on each side. On the front is a very large image of Brewster's town seal. All 351 towns in this state are required to have an official town seal. Official documents are stamped with the seal, which is actually an embosser which presses a raised design into the paper. This stamp on a document is proof that it is genuine, and not just something someone made up without authority to do so.

Usually town seals feature some special historic symbol, such as Eastham's seal showing their windmill, and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts seal depicting an Indian. Brewster's town seal features a chair. Not just any chair, but the chair of Elder Brewster. (You can see the chair itself at the Pilgrim Society Museum in Plymouth.) In Elder Brewster's day only very important people, such as government officials and heads of churches, sat on chairs. You might say even the king sat on a chair. For his throne,



Brewster's Town Flag

long may it wave!



which was a symbol of the highest authority, was basically a chair, although a very fancy one. Most people, however, sat on stools or benches. So in Elder Brewster's day a chair such as his came to represent authority. As a symbol of William Brewster himself, it also represented great integrity and concern for the well-being of the people. Translated into today's terms, the chair depicted on Brewster's town seal is a symbol of responsible town government.

On the other side of our town flag is a building, Brewster's former town hall building. It was the Town's second town hall, or "Town House" as they were called. (Brewster's very first Town House was located about where Dawes Hall now stands, across 6A from the First Parish Church.)

Up until this very first Town House was built in 1835 there was no town hall. The business of running the town was conducted in the First Parish Church.

You will recognize the building on our flag as the one located next to the fire station. Originally town officials had their offices there, and here town meetings were held. It was also the center for all sorts of community activities like dances and theater plays which were held upstairs in the auditorium. There were ham and beans suppers, and club meetings, and all manner of celebrations and gatherings of Brewster people. Thus did this former town hall building help shape the spirit, growth, and character of the Town of Brewster. And that is why it appears on one side of our town flag.



Brewster's very first Town Hall, then called the Town House, stood about where Dawes hall is now located...across 6A from Breakwater Road. This sketch was made from a very rare old photograph taken sometime after 1881

A WONDERFUL EYEWITNESS ACCOUNT

- What Brewster was like in 1806

The Pastor of the First Parish Church, John Simpkins, wrote a most interesting “Topical Description of Brewster” in 1806. The pace of living was so much slower then than it is now, it’s safe to say Brewster hadn’t changed much in the three years since its incorporation in 1803 and when Parson Simpkins so graphically described what the Town was like.

Back then the official center of a town was where its church stood. And Brewster’s First Parish Church stood very tall indeed, with its 110 foot high steeple...considerably taller than today’s tower. At such a height it must have provided ships out on the Bay with an excellent landmark, a matter of great importance where shipping by sea was common. The Brewster Historical Society has an old pencil sketch of the Church and its tall steeple.

In his account of our Town, Simpkins created a very strong feeling of how open and treeless the area was. He said that, although otherwise denuded of trees, in the center of Brewster there were several thriving apple orchards. And that, "In general, a young man who erects a dwelling house, if he have sufficiency of land, thinks as much of setting out an orchard as of laying out a garden". (The apple trees which blossom so prettily in the Egg Park, located next to the Church, were planted there in 1984 to symbolize those orchards now long gone.) Simpkins mentions that there were also trees on three sides of the Church, tall, quick-growing Lombardy Poplars, which would provide a windbreak for the building, exposed as it was to the sweep of wind off the Bay. Of course they long ago died off.

Simpkins said that the people of Brewster suffered severely for want of firewood because of the generally treeless condition not only here, but of the entire Cape. Speaking of this shortage of firewood he said, "...the general scarcity,

the distance of conveyance, and the high cost of labour, has raised (the price) to seven dollars a cord for oak, six dollars for pine.” To keep a fireplace, the family’s only cook “stove” and source of heat, going year ‘round would require many cords of wood. The Parson talks about burning peat, a practice we mostly associate with cottagers in Ireland who were destitute of firewood. “The scarcity of fuel, however is....remedied by the discovery of peat, which greatly abounds in swamps that are liberally interspersed throughout the Town. It is expected that great quantities will be dug and the fuel shortage solved.”

Along with the lack of firewood, good soils for farming were scarce also. John Simpkins described the poor, sandy condition of the soil which readily blew away and was not suitable for farming. However, the people “set out beach grass which speedily takes root, and serves as an effectual barrier” against further erosion. (Today’s Brewster

Conservation Commission still recommends this practice to help hold beach sand.)

One reason for the Town's lack of trees was the need for extensive hay fields where the farmers could raise good crops of hay for winter fodder for the animals. Simpkins recorded that Brewster people "cut 80 to 90 tons of hay" that year and each year increased the harvest. He also said "Considerable quantities of Indian corn and rye are raised". Wheat was not a very successful crop on the Cape.

Some Brewster farmers, trying to improve the quality of their poor soils, collected seaweed from the beach and plowed it in.

Apparently Simpkins traveled about a bit for he observed "In traveling the county road (our 6A) that runs through the town, you pass over several eminences which afford a pleasant and extensive view of the town". Looking to the northward one "beholds the waters of the Atlantick ocean

rolling into the Bay”. (Cape Cod Bay was at that time called Barnstable Bay.) Simpkins wrote that one can see “the form of the Cape as it bends toward Provincetown. A very sudden curvature commences 3 or 4 miles below Brewster, where the Cape becomes so narrow as to give the traveler a fair prospect of the waters on either side, and enables him to discern, at one view, vessels that are passing round the Cape and those that are sailing up the Bay”. (There was no Cape Cod Canal in 1806. It did not open until 1914.) And before that, vessels traveling up and down the coast had to skirt the long arm of the Cape, rounding Provincetown, and navigating the dangerous sand bars and shoals on the backside of the Cape, where the bones of many a wrecked ship still lie today.

The Reverend John Simpkins lived in a big square house located on Breakwater Road where the Capt. Freeman Inn now stands. He must have enjoyed walking down the sandy road to the beach for he observed that “at certain seasons

the reflection of the sun upon the windows and houses in Wellfleet and Truro” is easily seen from Brewster shores. Although much has changed since Simpkins recorded what he saw, the glinting windows across the Bay can sometimes still be seen when the sun’s angle is just right. And in the evening, a setting sun can make it look as though the windows were on fire!

Parson Simpkins was the third pastor of Brewster’s First Parish Church, serving for forty years from 1791 to 1831. He was noted for being a kindly man, and much loved by his congregation.



quotes from: Rev. John Simpkins, *Topical Description of Brewster, 1806*, Massachusetts Historical Society, Vol. X, Boston, 1809

HOW TO INTERPRET BREWSTER'S BICENTENNIAL SYMBOL

THE MILLSTONE

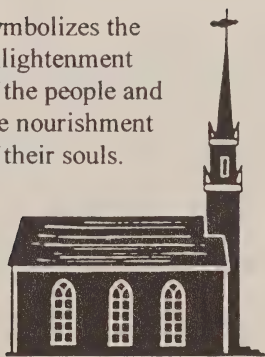
When the first settlers came into the wilderness territory, which later would become Brewster, they would have been greatly influenced in their choice of place by the fact that the only gristmill anywhere had been built here in 1663 on the Saugatucket Brook (Stony Brook) and they could get their corn ground. Corn was their daily bread, their mainstay the most nourishing of all grains when properly ground. But, being the hardest of all dried grains, it is extremely difficult to grind properly by any method other than the great millstones.

THE CHURCH

As important as the nourishment of the body, was the nourishment of the people's souls. One of the first actions taken by Brewster's parent town Harwich, upon becoming properly incorporate, was the building of the

THE CHURCH

Symbolizes the enlightenment of the people and the nourishment of their souls.



THE MILLSTONE

Symbolizes the industry of early settlers and the nourishment of their bodies.



1803

BREWSTER

BICENTENNIAL



2003

THE CHAIR

Symbolizes authority administered with responsive care and integrity.



THE SHIP

Symbolizes the shaping of Brewster by its seafaring past and its traditions as the Sea Captains' town.

First Parish Church and the gathering of its congregation in 1700. Adding to the significance of this action was the fact that, at this time, church and state functioned as one.

ELDER BREWSTER'S CHAIR

The Chair of Elder Brewster is the central motif of Brewster's official town seal. It symbolizes the great man without whose wise administration the first Pilgrim settlement might not have survived. The chair is an emblem of authority tempered with caring and integrity in directing the welfare of the people.

THE SHIP

As early as 1806 Brewster was known as the Captains' Town from the fact that Brewster sent more Captains and Mates to sea, in proportion to the town's population, than any other community. The influence of these sea men still lives in their fine homes, and the pride we still feel for their amazing accomplishments.

a framework of relevant dates=====

First Settlers

John Wing-John Dillingham 1659/60

Original Stony Brook Mill-1663

Present Mill building-1872

Town of Harwich Incorporated-1694

First Church Gathered-1700

Brewster/Harwich Separation-1803

Declaration of Independence-1776

Windmill Built-c1795

moved to present location-1974

Sears' Salt Works Patented-1799

War of 1812

Ragget's Great Salt Ransom-1813

Brewster's First Library-1853

First Town House (Hall)-1835

Second Town House (Hall)-1881

Cape Cod Canal Opened-1914

NOTES

NOTES

BREWSTER LADIES' LIBRARY



0 2200 0082418 9

Brewster Ladies' Library Assn
1822 Main Street
Brewster, MA 02631



South-eastern view of Brewster, (central part).

**Written especially for the school children of Brewster....
celebrating our Town's 2003 Bicentennial**

**By Joan Paine, author of
CAPE COD MASTERS OF THE SEAS
Extraordinary tales of Brewster Shipmasters & Packet Captains**

Word processing by Dave Damon

**Funding provided by the Brewster Bicentennial Celebration Committee
2002**